

Published July 18th, 2012

## Lafayette Resident Meg Murray is California School Nurse of the Year

By Sophie Braccini



Nurse Meg Murray Photo provided

This June, in addition to the California School Nurse of the Year award that she received from the California School Nurses Organization, Lafayette resident Meg Murray received an Excellence in School Nursing award at the National Association of School Nurses annual conference, "much to my surprise," says the humble woman. "I don't feel that I do anything more than all the other school nurses around."

Murray got her School Nurse Services Credential in 2002. Prior to going back to school for the credential, she was a critical care nurse in intensive, coronary, trauma and neonatal units for two decades. Like Murray, all school nurses are Registered Nurses that complete additional requirements to be credentialed. Their tasks are multiple, including: immunization, screening and evaluation; contribution to the pupils' educational plans, particularly those with special needs; being a resource to staff and teachers in implementing the health curriculum; counseling parents and pupils on health-related attendance problems; and helping school personnel adjust to physical, mental and social limitations of students.

"I see school nurses as guests in another person's field, the field of education," she says. "School nurses are at the interface of the health and the education domain. And sometimes the two are in conflict." Murray remembers when colleagues were able to get grants for well-researched prevention programs to be implemented in schools, "but with lack of academic support we lost the grants," she says. She also knows that when cuts have to be made, school districts weed out what they consider non-essential workers, and school nurses are part of it. Today some districts, like the Moraga School District, don't have a school nurse on staff. When that's the case, districts contract for screening. "The law also allows unlicensed assistive personnel (UAP), with training and oversight by a Registered School Nurse, to assist the students in administration of certain medication, and to give medication in emergency situations."

When small districts have a school nurse on staff, they often work part-time, and for more than one District. "It is a very isolating profession," she says. There are 40 school nurses in Contra Costa County who face very different types of issues. "One day I realized that I had no idea who the other school nurses were; there was no list, no group," says Murray. So with a friend she co-founded the Contra Costa County School Nurse Group. "We meet about three times a year to share information and provide each other with networking and support," she says.

Another great source of pride for Murray was to create and develop the nursing services department of the Lafayette School District. "I was called by the District in 2003 because they had three students coming in with special needs and no nurse on staff," she says. "Two had very severe seizure disorders and one kindergartener was diabetic. They had no idea how to establish the health plan for these students, or how to implement and evaluate it." She came in as an independent consultant and was hired to work for the District one day a week. "I was already working for the County at the time, but this was my home school district and my kids went there; that's why I wanted to support them," she says.

Murray is currently the school nurse for the Counseling and Education Program at Marchus School, a unique Contra Costa school that serves about 130 high-risk children in grades K-12. "Marchus is a unique public school program that provides academic classes and intensive psycho-educational services to students referred by their home school," she says. "The objective is to stabilize them, instill behavioral and academic skills and return them to their home school district." At Marchus she works with the students' extended mental health team, and makes sure that the nursing diagnoses are incorporated into the students' health plan. She also oversees medication administration, among other support services offered to the students, staff and parents.

"Our motto is healthy students, healthy schools," says Murray. "There is a very clear connection between students' health and academic success."

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